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Abstract

Memes are a participatory public discourse which can express political ideological constructs to different online communities. This paper investigates if internet users actually construct humour to express their political concerns and determines the possible ways in which humour can fulfil that persuasive role. For this purpose, an analytical and descriptive research was conducted, based on the multimodal analysis of 35 memes dealing with a particular political event of international current relevance, the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union, through the exploration of both visual and textual components. The results furnish evidence for the humorous nature of political memes which allow ordinary people to express their political insights through the use of multiple verbal and visual devices. Recommendations for future research are included.

Thematic key words	Internet memes, verbal humour, visual humour, multimodal discourse, Brexit
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1. Introduction

Humour as a strategy in discourse pervades everyday life and is found in a varied number of areas, including politics. Notwithstanding, little work has been done on the use of humour in political discourse, particularly in memes created by ordinary internet users, and therefore, that lack of previous study has motivated, among other reasons, the present carried out research. Another main motivation is the distinction of the new generations for their way of expression, a new digital communication that strengthens their belonging to a global community. An additional reason is the use of English used as *lingua franca* which appears as an advantage when it comes to accessing all parts of the world with the only requisite of having access to the Internet. In this regard, there is a need to explore how language works in memes since linguistic phenomena can be powerful tools to convey a message.

Another reason that motivates this research is the huge impact of Brexit. Political memes dealing with the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union are analysed in the present study because this is a current sociopolitical event that is having a powerful impact nowadays, not only for British citizens but for other nationalities too, particularly those belonging to the European Union. Moreover, Brexit is actually transcending in social media, and hence this research paper will be based on its correlation with memes to determine how the public opinion on this particular phenomenon in politics is expressed in this new mode of discourse.

The overall structure of the study takes the form of 7 chapters, including this introductory chapter. The second one begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the analysis. The third section lists the research questions and further interests. Chapter four shows a synopsis of the research methods. The fifth chapter is devoted to the results obtained from the analysis of the corpus. Chapter 6 deals with a summary and a critique of the findings, and with the

identification of some areas for further research. Finally, the bibliography and the appendix appear to present information about the sources consulted and the memes analysed, respectively.

2. Memes: origin and function in today's internet community in relation with the political discourse about Brexit

Nowadays, memes are a constantly growing digital phenomenon which is closely associated with the younger generations, who are considered to be virtual creators and consumers. However, this concept dates back to the year 1971, when Richard Dawkins first referred to it in his book called *The Selfish Gene*. This recognised ethologist coined the term *meme* after using -and abbreviating- the Ancient Greek word *μίμημα* (*mīmēma*) which refers to a unit that is imitated, indicating therefore his inclinations towards the universal Darwinism principle, which he includes in his theory on memetics. Memes are units of cultural information which are transmitted from one brain to another within a social group by means of replication or imitation to procure cultural inheritance and evolution (Dawkins, 1971). In this sense, Dawkins established the theory of memes based upon his evolutionary zoology postulate, employing the metaphor of genes to attribute a similar reproductive capacity to memes from a cultural perspective.

Nonetheless, there are distinctions between genes and memes. Unlike genes, memes cannot replicate themselves since they need minds to be spread, as Dawkins himself states in his book. These “minds” or “brains” correspond to the consumers of memes who also participate actively in their propagation, and consequently play an important role in this process of cultural transmission. In this sense, memes rely on “affinity spaces”, a concept proposed by James P. Gee (2004) who refers to the different areas of interest

that these meme consumers share and use to express their own perception, experiences and feelings. For this reason, memes are considered a social construct where participants in the online community create humour resorting to different kinds of patterns.

Moreover, there is no static meaning bound to the meme since it loses its original one when it passes from one mind to another, acquiring new interpretations all the time. Hence, the subjective vision that people possess creates another dissimilitude between gene and meme, as the former has the capacity to replicate without further modification.

However, the meme corresponding to the original concept, which is still studied within memetics, cannot be completely compared to the “internet meme” which has emerged in recent years as an appropriation of the original idea; the reason is the user-generated nature of the latter which is inside “a fertile ecosystem for the spread of memes” (R. Dawkins, personal communication, May 8, 2018). For this reason, throughout this paper, the term *meme* will refer to *internet meme*.

Due to their identification as a discursive genre, memes also stimulate the interest in other aspects of culture, more recently in politics. In a humorous tone, memes have the ability to represent the socio-political climate along with their effects in the people who, thanks to the new technologies, have been able to express their particular concerns and to gather a powerful collective voice. Brexit is the term referring to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union which initially covered the political process from the 23rd of June 2016 to the 29th of March 2019, as this was the date expected for the UK to formally leave the EU. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom David Cameron promised that, if he won the parliamentary elections of 2015 he would call for a referendum about the future of the country. The referendum question was apparently easy: “should the United Kingdom remain a member

of the European Union or leave the European Union?" A narrow majority of voters (51.9% of the vote versus 48.1%) opted in favour of leaving the EU. However, the process officially started when Theresa May, the new Prime Minister after David Cameron resigned, triggered Article 50. After that event occurred on the 29th of March 2017, a period of negotiations with the EU started but brought no significant agreement on essential aspects not yet covered, which led to the dissension of the majority of the British, as it entailed great uncertainty. This dissatisfaction is clearly visible in the social media, particularly in memes that use humour to express the daily events dealing with Brexit. That humour, along with anomalous juxtaposition, and intertextuality is what Knobel and Lankshear (as cited in Yoon, 2016) proposed as essential characteristic of memes to guarantee their spreading. Intertextuality refers to the presence of a written or spoken text in another text. However, scholars could not agree in defining in what a text entails (Prentice & Barker, 2017), and thus, the term *interdiscursivity* was coined to refer to the relation between one discourse and another, as the discourse not only covers the text *per se*, but also the context of communication, that is, concerning the references to the popular culture of a certain social group, which can also constitute images. These cross-references are associated to affinity spaces, which were previously mentioned and which produce a sense of belonging through common cultural experiences to spread a particular opinion (Gee, 2014).

An anomalous juxtaposition is a kind of combination "made through putting incongruous images together, and can be provocative or simply odd" (Yoon, 2016, p. 3). This can be connected to the Incongruity Theory of Humour, a generally accepted theoretical approach to humour that involves the incongruity of two objects, since humour is the result of one's unexpectedness (Berger, 1993; Ross, 1998). Following the Resolution (IR) model, humour can

be found in texts or images, the latter being the most popular form where humorous opposition is observed.

3. Objectives

The aim of this study is to prove that memes are able to express political opinions through different techniques which are characteristic of this type of discourse. Hence, this paper specifically aims to check the use of humour to convey political discourse in the form of memes, and from a multimodal perspective as the content is mainly presented through a combination of visual and textual information. In particular, the two main research objectives are as follows: (1) Can internet users express their political concerns using humour in memes?, and (2) If this is possible, how is humour employed through textual and visual devices in the meme?

For this research purpose, a corpus of memes related with the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, so-called Brexit, was analysed through a multimodal lens to determine how humour is achieved. The selection of this socio-political matter was due to its relevance today as it entails one of the most significant events in Europe's contemporary history for having created a chaotic political climate.

Another interest is to hopefully shed some light on the recognition of memes as genres still to discover in the research world because of its relative novelty and its continuous evolution. At first glance, there are many studies about memes particularly studying how they play with visual and textual devices to convey a message, although just a few deal with political content. For that reason, another objective, which is underlying, is the encouragement to recognise memes as objects of study specifically taking a sociolinguistic perspective as regards politics.

4. Methodology

For this study, an analytical and descriptive approach was employed using data extracted from 6 meme sites: Reddit, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest and Facebook. The primary sources were 35 memes whose theme was Brexit or a socio-political event occurred or produced which was related to it, and which were selected for the fulfilment of the following parameters: time, humour, and origin of the creators of the chosen memes.

The first step was to select the political events inside the Brexit scenery that had a big impact on social media which can be seen through the huge amount of memes created on account of that moment. These were the Referendum which was held on the 23rd of June 2016 and which started the Brexit process; the triggering of Article 50 on the 29th of March 2017; Theresa May's cabinet resignation in July 2018; and finally, the Withdrawal Agreement in November 2018. Then, memes were searched using general hashtags (*#Brexit*, *#brexiteer*, *#remoaner*, *#TheresaMay*, *#BorisJohnson*, *#BrexitShambles...*) or specific ones related to the subject matter (*#MayMustGo*, *#WheresBoris...*), or simply accessing accounts that offer huge collections of memes dealing with Brexit and looking for the date wanted. During the recollection of the corpus, the authors of the gathered memes were selected on the basis of their British origin and of the reflection in those memes of their different perspectives as regards the exit of the UK from the EU, that is, pro-Brexit and against-Brexit memes. Nonetheless, there is no equal presence of both opinions reflected in the data as there were more memes criticising the policies and decisions taken to make Brexit possible than the ones that displayed a positive message about them. Once the data was finally gathered and categorised according to the particular episode inside Brexit panorama which they showed, it was checked if they fulfilled a humour's purpose as that was the common characteristic they needed to share.

Subsequently, a general explanation of the content of each meme was presented along with its relation with the political and social background they make reference to, and with the detailed analysis of the verbal and visual devices employed to present the situation in a humorous way. Furthermore, humour was interpreted relying on the Incongruity Theory of Humour both in images and texts. The analysis focused on their intertextuality and interdiscursivity since the content is constructed juxtaposing images and texts which are usually taken from pop culture as society influences all types of discourse and genres. For such purpose, a critical multimodal discourse analysis was employed, thus combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) as research methodologies for this study.

Those methodologies and the principles mentioned above could be employed thanks mainly to a number of scientific magazines dealing with the meme as ideographematic genre focusing on its multimodal features and humoristic tone (*Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education, Journal of Visual Culture...*), and articles and papers found in online search engines focused on academic concerns such as *Goggle Scholar*, or simply gathered inside academic websites such as *Academia.edu* and *Research Gate*.

5. Result analysis

Limor Shifman (as cited in Dainas, 2015) established three dimensions for the analysis of memes: form, content and stance. The content is the message which is presented to the receiver through the format. And finally, the stance is “the creator of the meme’s position with respect to the meme, the reader and other creators of memes” (p. 15).

For this research, the content of the memes gathered was interpreted taking into account the form and regarding this later aspect, two main levels, which correspond to the linguistic and visual modes of communication, were distinguished to be covered in the analysis. Textual information can be disposed in different ways and combined with one or more images to deliver the message the meme contains. As observed in this corpus, language appears to be effective in the meme goal of spreading a message through the use of different language mechanisms, which can be observed in the memes analysed next.

Homophony appears as the most frequent linguistic phenomenon which was found in the “meme pool”. In three out of four memes containing homophones, the abbreviation for the European Union, *EU*, was observed. In all three cases, *EU* makes allusion to the personal pronoun *you*, based on similar pronunciation. It is the case of the common expression “see you later” (see Figure 34) and two famous sentences belonging to two different songs: “I can’t live if living is without you” from Mariah Carey’s song called “Without You” (see Figure 35 in Appendix) and “Never mind I’ll find someone like you” from “Someone Like You” of Adele (see Figure 1), being also cases of interdiscursivity.



Figure 1. Adele singing meme (August 31, 2016). Source: Facebook.

In this last example, a speech balloon contains the phrase taken from the song to which the meme makes reference, where the original word *you* has been replaced by the abbreviation. Once the receiver of this meme reads the content of this speech bubble, he or she might automatically understand the reason for the substitution, and hence, the political message behind the humorous exchange of words. In the original song, the word *you* makes reference to the singer's lost old love that she seems to miss. She addresses him directly to say that some day she will find a person to love as much as she has loved him. When the replacement of the personal pronoun is made with the shortening *EU*, this latter acquires the sentimental significance that Adele wanted to express to the person this song was intended for. Moreover, this text is reinforced by the juxtaposed images of Adele with a sad countenance and the flag of the United Kingdom behind her. This visual metaphor (Morozova, 2017) can be seen as a symbol of the opinion of many British citizens who believe they will overcome the separation from the European Union.

The remaining meme of the four containing homophones (see Figure 2) includes the word *Brexit*, whose first syllable is pronounced like the first syllable of the word *breakfast*. This type of homophony is partial since not the full words have equal pronunciation. This image presents the President of the United States, Donald Trump, in front of a microphone and with a hand gesture implying he is giving a speech, which is going to be corresponded with the captions enclosing the image. In this case, it can be understood the importance of images since they help perceive the correspondence between speaker and speech. In the first two sentences the word *Brexit* appears, and the reader may infer that its signifier (form) seems to correspond with the signified (meaning) because here "the president" states his "affection" for the British withdrawal process. However, in the third sentence, it is evident that

there is a confusion between *brexit* and *breakfast* since Trump conveys the meaning of the latter word to the first, understanding thus Brexit as “*the most important meal of the day*”. Moreover, in the bottom text, the meaning of Brexit is again confused with the meaning of this type of meal because it is attributed to the fast done during Ramadan.



Figure 2. Donald Trump on Brexit meme (April 2, 2017). Source: Facebook.

*Ramada** appears as the example of another linguistic phenomenon, so-called “clipping”. The correct word of Arab origin to describe the month of fasting in the Islamic calendar is *Ramadan* and not *Ramada** as it is written as part of Trump’s fictional speech. This mistake, along with the case of partial homophony, builds the online reputation of this public figure. The meme makes evident that only a person ignoring the existence of the words *Brexit* and *Ramadan*, and hence does not know what they mean, can make such a mistake, because there is a common knowledge regarding the existence of both words for the reader to understand the humour here. In this sense, an apparent lack of international culture is being attributed to the USA president. It is visible that the linguistic units which are used in the memes selected are characterised by being homophones of key words present in this period of

negotiations which the United Kingdom is facing, and therefore they are essential words to describe the political situation.

Regarding the shortening of *EU*, there are two memes based on the written form of this linguistic unit. One of them just includes the abbreviation humorously found in the name of a North American TV show (see Figure 28 in Appendix). The other meme treats the two first vowels of the word *Australia* as the abbreviation for the European Union (see Figure 3), conveying hence the notion that Australia is as well part of this organisation of countries. However, the comparison is made partially within the written level because the abbreviation bears resemblance to the set of two vowels only in the second one (*EU* and *AU*).

In terms of the socio-political message, in order to mock the decision which the British people took in the Referendum, the author/s of this article invented a possible future situation for Australia similar to what is happening in the UK as Figure 3 below shows. Notwithstanding, the impossibility of this idea resides merely in the common knowledge that the name of the country was not coined due to the belonging or not to the European Union (a union Australians do not even belong to). For this reason, there is a comparison between the withdrawal decision taken by the British and the apparently unnecessary fictitious decision of doing the same just by changing the two first vowels in their country's name.



Figure 3. Stralia meme (June 24, 2016). Source: Google Images

Another instance of homonymy is the meme shown in Figure 4. Now the relation of homonymy between two linguistic units is not homophony, but homography since they share the same spelling. This is the case of the abbreviation *GB*, which at first sight refers to the technical word *gigabyte* in this meme, because this shortening is commonly seen referring to this word, but nevertheless, it also makes reference to *Great Britain* after a more careful reading. The polysemous word *space* gives a hint to the reader to understand the connotation of place linked, whose connection with the reference to technology creates humour. Additionally, the appearance of the shortenings *UK* and *EU*, and the complementary image of Nigel Farage help to select the second context as the correct one.

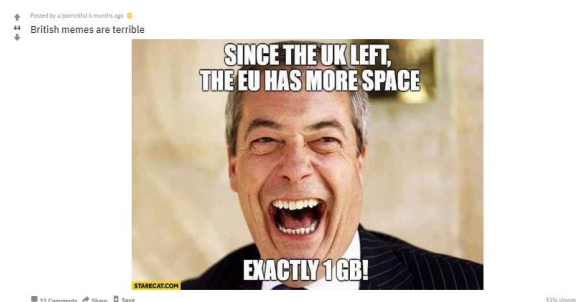


Figure 4. 1 GB left Nigel Farage meme (n.d.). Source: Reddit.

Another case of wordplay is polysemy, which appears in two of the memes examined (see Figures 24 and 25 in Appendix) through the word *cabinet* with two meanings: one is associated to the political sphere as it refers to a small group of individuals who hold high positions in government and who have the function of guiding the decisions of the Prime Minister whereas the other refers to a piece of furniture. In both memes, either by the word or by the image of the famous furniture retail company IKEA, both meanings can be associated in a humorous way.

The process of substitution, inside the linguistic level, is visible in seven memes (see Figures 5, 14, 26, 27, 31, 32, and 33 in Appendix). As regards this

phenomenon, the Figure 5 seems to be the most representative one because of the singular way of replacing certain linguistic units.



Figure 5. Brexit verb in dictionary meme (n.d.). Source: Tumblr.

The word *Brexit* is presented as an entry of a dictionary, appearing with a colloquial (and vulgar) definition due to the appearance of the phrasal verb *fuck up*. The entry appears with the category of the word and a conversation by way of example, which contains a conjugated form of the verb in the past simple tense next to another case of substitution with the name *Theresa May*, to put the finishing touch on the humorous meme. *Theresa May* changes its word category, turning from a proper noun into what it seems to be an adjective, like the word *Brexit*, which originally is also a proper noun that turns into a verb. In this sense, another linguistic phenomenon is the named “conversion”. The noun *brexit* is the replacement of some sort of verb that describes an action with bad consequences and *Theresa May* might be the adjective that describes a person for taking a bad decision. These new meanings attributed to these proper nouns have a negative perception which is associated to their original referents, which are a political event and the current British Prime Minister respectively. Metonymy is the figure of speech used to link these signifieds

with these unique signifiers. The negative connotation people can have of Brexit and Theresa May has been used in this meme to play creatively with words, and hence to make a critique to the direction this political issue, triggered by decisions made by Theresa May, is taking.

So far one can observe the important role creativity plays through the different language phenomena above explained to achieve a humorous purpose so that the political message can be delivered in an easier way. Another linguistic phenomenon which is characterised by the creative process of originating new words is called “blending”. Blending is a mechanism of word formation that is present in two memes (see Figure 6 below and Figure 23 in Appendix). The following is one of these memes which include a case of lexical blending.



Figure 6. Boris Goneson meme (July 9, 2018). Source: Twitter.

The newly created word “Goneson” is an example of wordplay. Its constituents are the past participle form of the verb *go* and the surname of the British politician Boris Johnson. The surname has survived in its last syllable (*-son*), which is the last part of the second base word, since the new word created does not need the first syllable (*John-*) to help the reader infer that it refers to the surname of its preceding name *Boris*. On the contrary, *Gone-* has kept its complete form to make a clear attribution to the member of the British Government, because the purpose of this blend is to expose publicly the resignation of Boris from Theresa May’s cabinet.

Regarding this particular politician, the last linguistic phenomenon observed in the corpus presents him as protagonist. This figure of speech does not deal with neologisms, yet it contributes to the creativeness in language in terms of

syntactic structures. Parallelism is the repetition of a part of a sentence and plays an important role in wordplay, since it may help understand the message through grammatically similar linguistic units even producing an effect of surprise which can facilitate the transmission. For this reason, the following meme (see Figure 7) is a great example to analyse.



Figure 7. Flying Boris meme (n.d.). Source: Google Images

It is important to mention that this parallel structure comes from a slogan created to announce the British film *Johnny English 3*, whose main character was presented as someone clueless and incompetent for the role he played as a secret agent in this comedy. The wordplay used to describe this inefficient, yet funny, character is transferred to the internet in the form of a meme to ridicule Boris Johnson.

The two first sentences might convey a positive image of this individual. However, before reaching the third one, the user may already know the critical purpose of the meme, whether because of the fact that they remember the cinematic origin of the text or because they are used to this kind of parallel structures in memes. They expect a “surprise effect” reaching the third sentence because it is when the creator of the meme puts the new information containing humour in connection with the entire text through a linguistic ambiguity. As a further matter, the person reading the meme is at the same

time seeing and interpreting its image, and comparing it with the verbal information given. Hence, the reader can also infer the negative appreciation of Boris because of the funny situation in which he is involved.

Another form of parallel structure is the one shown in Figure 8 which has become part of the characteristic language used in internet memes nowadays. Nevertheless, a parallel structure is not the only pattern that is repeated in several memes; there are other examples of memes whose captions seem to be well-known within a significant part of the internet community like the ones included in Figures 9, 11, 15, 16, 21, 22, 27, 29, 30, and 33 (see Appendix).



Figure 8. She protect, she attack but most importantly she need her cabinet back: Theresa May meme (July 9, 2018). Source: Twitter.

The main formula of the meme dealing with Theresa May (see Figure 8) contains the fixed phrasal expression *he protec**, *he attac**, *but most importantly...* and keeps the rhyme in the last two lines (*attac** and *bac**), which makes the message more musical, easy to retain and humorous. Humour here comes also from the incongruity that exists in the combination of a musical and easy eye-catching message with a serious matter, as it concerns the current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. In this respect, other ways of provoking laughter, as previously mentioned, is the use of additional visual information that contributes to the picturing of the scenes presented in the meme with

chosen pictures of Theresa May in which she behaves or has facial expressions matching the sentences in the left.

The origin of this meme is related with animals, and for that reason the final consonants of the words *protect*, *attack* and *back* are removed. This modification of the structure is used in memes whose protagonists are animals, mostly pets, to give the impression that the animal itself is talking (Mc Culloch, 2014). In this case, this unique way of expression preferred for animals is kept maybe to compare these instinctive behaviours characteristic of animals with Theresa May's actions in her political post.

Occasionally, certain words or expressions originated as part of the popular culture and started to be used in memes, even turning into a popular written form of expression of this new type of internet multimodal discourse.

In some cases, these expressions are so rooted in the meme culture that some users who have not seen the first memes using that kind of language will not know the original reference to which the verbal information of the meme alludes. An example of this situation can be the above analysed meme in Figure 7 mocking Boris Johnson: some could remember the origin of those sentences if they have seen the trailer of the film or simply the poster which advertised it, but many others who may not have experienced this event could not recognise where these words come from. Another case is when this characteristic way of communication belongs to the popular culture, but emerges within the meme sphere. Nonetheless, when the user has not a reference to understand the meaning of those words, it still may be easy to catch the significance because this kind of language tends to express universal feelings and activities, the majority of which the average receiver of memes can feel identified with (Shifman, 2014).

In this sense, the malleability of memes makes possible a more realistic and accurate way of representing the contents, and the previously commented

fictional speech of public figures can be located within this aspect. With this characteristic way of presenting the text, another way of discrediting a person can be found, that is, through his or her particular way of communicating. Characteristic sentences or just expressions of that public figure are essential to make the reader recognise that person just reading or hearing a few words for his or her subsequent critique. Another method to achieve the personification of a person, or in this case a group of individuals represented by a country, is the direct address done in the meme to let the reader know who the referent is (see Figure 10 in Appendix). Returning to the technique of simulating someone's speech, the already seen meme of Donald Trump (see Figure 2) and the meme of Theresa May articulating her famous motto "strong and stable" (see Figure 9) can serve as good examples.



Figure 9. Hiding from serial killer Theresa May meme (May 4, 2017). Source: Twitter.

To facilitate an easier recognition, the unique sentence of this last meme mentioned is accompanied by a photocut of May's face which has been carefully used to replace the original face included in this meme. It is a remixed image made from still images and which places the prime minister inside a wardrobe. Therefore, a discursive link is established between May and a man who is characterised by a persistent will of saying a determined set of words as he likes them or simply the idea they stand for to the point of

exposing himself to an imminent danger so that he can express those words one more time. The implication may be then that Theresa May is not scared to expose herself if that means repeating again her 2017 general election slogan.

In this case, it can be observed how the meme can be malleable in terms of images as well. The contextual relation between text and image guarantee the delivering of a message and thus, makes the complementary role of images essential for the effectiveness of the meme's purpose. However, visual personification can also be applied to countries or union of countries (Thompson, 2017) through the image of their flag or logo as it is the case of Figures 1, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 33). The "strong and stable" meme shows, however, quite well the power that images have to transmit humour through that particular way of presentation with opposing images, which results in the reader's unexpectedness and humorous response.

6. Conclusions

Taking into account the research questions, it is possible to state that memes act as participatory media where anyone can express their particular political opinion, because the Internet has facilitated the participation of different communities through this computer-mediated communication. To reach those online communities, memes possess the power to persuade internet users about a contemporary socio-political issue such as Brexit. Among these factors, the use of humour should be highlighted as it makes the delivering of the message more effective.

The corpus has shown how humour is employed in several ways. One of them concerns its cohesive nature regarding different Internet communities

because, according to the principle of affinity spaces, memes include references to popular culture that allow the reader to feel more identified with the message. Interdiscursivity was thus the most appeared aspect in the analysis with in the form of linguistic and visual devices as well: lyrics from songs; titles or famous expressions of movies; common expressions belonging to a public figure; scenes of popular TV shows, TV series or games; or simply images or captions of memes already recognised by meme consumers.

Humour can appear in the form of images, texts or a combination of both. In this regard, the second research objective was demonstrated, since the analysis of different visual and linguistic components of memes allowed for the identification of a generic structure of humour in internet memes. Through both visual and linguistic devices, the memes chosen express dissent, and through that discrepancy with the ruling power, they transmit some political ideological constructs to other internet users. In the memes analysed, this persuasive purpose is seen in the mocking and satirisation of the ruling power from the European Union, and mainly from the United Kingdom, through different mechanisms. The malleability that language possesses in memes provides playfulness to refer to those politicians, and creativity and originality, which can be fostered to the rest online community. This apparent freedom to shape language in this type of discourse can be appreciated in the previous analysis with the use of multiple language mechanisms such as homophony, homography, clipping, blending, conversion, parallelism, metonymy or the mere substitution of certain linguistic units. Special mention should be made to the words and expressions that are selected to convey the personal speech of a major figure in politics so that there is a clearer reference to the politician who is the target of criticism. The value of images is also essential, even if at times has a complementary function. In the majority of the cases seen in the results, humour is achieved through juxtaposed images,

which were shown to operate in accordance with the Incongruity Theory of Humour, being the case of flags to represent a quality of the country or faces of high representatives of those countries. These images help to identify also the public figure by complementing the captions in the meme.

The research findings show that, despite the absurd nature of images or texts, memes are not meaningless for the sole reason of using humour. They can serve as a social critique, and for that reason they have a social function that goes beyond provoking laughter (Morozova, 2017) being this latter purpose a mechanism to fulfil the persuasive aim that the creator of the meme has. In this sense, the role of humour is determining people's willingness to express their particular political affiliation through the entertainment of the reader.

To conclude this some limitations need to be considered. First, the findings of this research are indicative rather than representative based on a corpus consisting of 35 memes. In this sense, the corpus gathered could be considered small also due to the social networking sites employed for its search of memes. Secondly, this research did not determine the effectiveness of the data gathered in terms of success through likes, retweets or another system to know the level of agreement. The only aspect examined to determine the effectiveness was humour through different language mechanisms and images.

As regards further research, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the aspects dealing with the author of the meme and the receiver, and thus, it would be interesting to conduct some research among the authors and the audience to analyse the motivations to create a particular meme, and the extent to which relevant humorous devices help influence the readers' political opinions, following a cognitive model of humour.

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8. Appendix



Figure 10. UK's surprise box meme (June 24, 2016). Source: Facebook.



Figure 11. This Is Fine David Cameron meme (June 24, 2016). Source: Facebook.



Figure 12. An Idiot Sandwich meme (June 29, 2016). Source: Facebook.



Figure 13. Separate But Equal meme (April 3, 2017). Source: Facebook.



Figure 14. Liberté, Egalité, Beyoncé meme (June 27, 2016). Source: Facebook



Figure 15. Another One DJ Khaled meme (July 9, 2018). Source: Twitter



Figure 16. 1984 George Orwell meme (n.d.). Source: Tumblr



Figure 17. UK vs UK meme (n.d.). Source: Tumblr



Figure 18. Flying Boris Rescue meme (n.d.). Source: Google Images



Figure 19. Flying Boris Greetings meme (n.d.). Source: Google Images



Figure 20. Brexit Means Brexit meme (n.d.). Source: Google Images



Figure 21. This Is Fine Theresa May meme (n.d.). Source: Google Images



Figure 22. Now What Brexit meme (June 24, 2016). Source: Twitter



Figure 23. Regrexit meme (June 30, 2016). Source: Twitter



Figure 24. Theresa's Cabinet meme (November 15, 2018). Source: Twitter



Figure 25. Theresa's Cabinet meme (November 15, 2018). Source: Twitter



Figure 26. Grand Theft Brexit meme (November 15, 2018). Source: Instagram



Figure 27. It Was Time for Theresa meme (January 14, 2019). Source: Instagram



Figure 28. EU Triggered meme (n.d.). Source: Goggle Images



Figure 29. One Taught Me Brexit meme (n.d.). Source: Goggle Images



Figure 30. LOL No Idea meme (January 14, 2019). Source: Instagram



Figure 31. You Are the Brexit Queen meme (January 14, 2019). Source: Instagram



Figure 32. Despicable May meme (June 30, 2017). Source: Twitter



Figure 33. Why Are You Leaving meme (n.d.). Source: Google Images

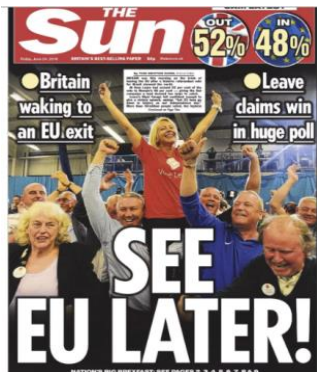


Figure 34. See You Later meme (n.d.). Source: Google Images



Figure 35. Can't Live Without EU meme (n.d.). Source: Google Images